edexcel

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE in Music Technology (6MT01) Paper 1

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

Summer 2015
Publications Code US042226
All the material in this publication is copyright
© Pearson Education Ltd 2015

Principals' Report

The overall impression is that, once again the broad pattern of submissions witnessed over the last few years has been at least maintained and there is some evidence of an increase in the quality of work being submitted. The quality of multi-track recordings remains the strongest of the 3 practical tasks. However, the quality of submissions for task 1A were also good this year.

The logs show that centres are continuing to make appropriate equipment choices, (a trend that has been witnessed over the last few years). This is giving candidates an excellent chance of successful coursework completion.

There were very few examples of candidates failing to meet the criteria of the specification. An increasing number of candidates are recognising the importance of questions 9 and 10 in the logbook - the marks scored here can have a very significant impact upon the overall grade awarded.

Sequenced Realised Performance

This year's stimulus was *"La La La"* by Naughty Boy featuring Sam Smith.
As has been the case in previous years, candidates are tending to approach this task in one of three ways; those who enter data incorrectly, those who enter it accurately but with a mechanical result, and those who produce a musical performance with editing, shaping and attention to detail.

The majority of candidates pursued this task successfully, with many having clearly referenced both the skeleton score and the original recording to complete their sequence. However, there continues to be a need for greater subtlety in the shaping of the MIDI data. Most submissions fell within the 21-25 (competent) mark descriptor (as was the case last year).

Pitch and rhythm

The pitch/rhythm data entry was accurate. It was uncommon to find significant errors in pitch and/or rhythm in submissions and quite common to hear work that showed candidates had been listening closely to replicate the full arrangement of parts. Most candidates successfully inputted the given skeleton score whilst many showed evidence of close study of the original recording through the programming of additional parts. A significant amount of copy/paste was needed to produce a successful realisation of *La La La* and the overwhelming majority of candidates made at least some attempt to go beyond the skeleton score.

The high synth counter melody and vocal variations towards the end of the track were crucial additions to the skeleton score. The success with which candidates entered these elements differed considerably. In addition, some candidates did not swing the hi hat rhythm - this had a significant impact on the "feel" of the song.

Common errors included:
- omission or incorrect input of high synth counter melody
- omission of the vocal variations towards the end of the track
- vocal octaves
- lack of swung hi hats

Timbre

Many examiners again noted the continued trend towards more successful timbre choice and editing. In most cases, candidates' work showed good evidence of accurate listening and analysis to select correct instrumental timbres. Many candidates had made some attempt to alter the envelopes of the sounds. Quite often, however, there was insufficient editing of sounds to match the characteristics of the original instrumentation.
There are still a number of candidates who rely too heavily upon presets, whilst some of the editing undertaken was not entirely successful, with a consequent impact on the success of the mix. Common problematic areas were excessive FX/auto-panning/modulation (which are often pre-applied to "out of the box" patches in contemporary DAW packages), or inappropriate ADSR settings for replicating the envelope of a given part.

The vocal timbre was generally well selected with less candidates choosing non-sustaining timbres (e.g. piano). However, care needs to be taken to create some contrast between the different vocal parts. In addition, some candidates struggled to select/shape an appropriate bass timbre.

The improvements in the quality of responses to question 2 in the logbook were maintained this year and provided a very helpful resource to examiners when assessing the extent to which a candidate has worked with the timbres.

Balance / Pan

As in previous years, candidates who omitted timbres, for example, by missing out a part, failed to access the full marks for this criterion. Most candidates, however, demonstrated good awareness of appropriate balancing. This is one area where close and continual reference to the original recording is particularly important, since even slight alterations to timbre or arrangement by candidates can impact the effectiveness of their overall balance, at any stage. The electric piano line (from bar 25 onwards) was one part in particular that was commonly omitted.

The vast majority of candidates approached panning in an appropriate manner.

Musicality

Most candidates attempted to recreate some of the dynamic features highlighted in the skeleton score and evident in the original recording. These were usually created (often successfully) through textural changes. There were clear dynamic shifts at bars 25, 33 and 73. There was also a sense of swell between bars 29 and 33. Attempts to replicate these shifts

were credited by examiners. Failure to input all the instrumental parts often had a negative impact upon the dynamics as many of the shifts were due to textural changes.

The articulation and phrasing remains a challenge to many candidates, although increasing numbers of candidates are attempting to shape the MIDI data more. The majority scored 'inconsistent' as there was insufficient attention given to shaping the vocal part through subtle use of note lengths, pitch bends and modulation. Where changes were made, they varied in the degree to which they were successful. Some candidates took great care to replicate the subtle nuances of the vocal line, whilst others took a more generalised approach to pitch bend and modulation, which often led to erratic outcomes. Such details are crucial in successfully realising the vocal part.

Style / Music technology skills

La La La had a number of added elements which helped create the overall sense of style. The delay on the vocal was a key characteristic of the productions, as was the filtered sweep. Candidates who attempted these did so with varying degrees of success. However, high scoring submissions had included these features successfully. Errors in timbral editing and lack of attention to dynamics, articulation and phrasing highlighted above continue to be the other main causes of inconsistency.

The success in handling the end of the sequence was varied. The majority of candidates inputted the given fade, but some fades were inconsistently handled or not attempted at all.

The final masters continue to be of a good or excellent standard. Less candidates are chopping either the start or the end of the track (in all 3 tasks). However, there are still some candidates who are needlessly losing marks through a careless error that is easily avoided. Again, less candidates had long lead outs (more than 5 seconds) this year than previously heard.

Candidates are again reminded to study the mark scheme for this part of the task, as there is a reference to chopped beginnings and endings, often ignored. Work should always be checked to ensure that the lead-in and lead-out is not excessive (no more than 5 seconds) and that details such as a reverb tail or the decay of a synth pad are not cut off.

Multi-track Recording

As in the past, this tended to be the best done of the three tasks. However, many candidates still do not consider the potential practical challenges that can be invoked or avoided by their particular choice of stimulus. Generally, the more successful submissions had clearly selected a piece and arrangement suited to the given recording environment, resources and musicians. In these instances, candidates usually had less corrective work to achieve at the processing stage.

Some candidates are still choosing pieces that are beyond the demands of the specification (both in terms of track count and complexity). Whilst there are examples of outstanding work in these cases, more often than not such material proves to be beyond the level of skill demonstrated by most AS Level candidates.

There were, once again fewer examples this year of candidates adopting questionable means with which to meet the task requirements in terms of track and microphone count. However, there were still a few examples of this. Such an approach does not benefit the candidate as, at best, it does not give sufficient scope for candidates to demonstrate their skill level and, at worst, it can lead to a loss of marks. Centres should again note that the following actions will almost certainly lead to a loss of marks:

- recording tracks with an inappropriate number of microphones (e.g. two mics on a bass amp)
- recording only the drum track and bass part of the song whilst still meeting the required number of mics/tracks (thus submitting a song that is regarded as 'incomplete' according to the mark scheme)
- using the studio software to copy a previously recorded track onto a second track. This does not count as an extra track.

The most successful centres continue to be those that keep things fairly simple; vocals, guitars, percussion, DI keyboards are typical examples of instruments that are largely well recorded.

Capture

As in previous years, this was generally the most successfully achieved aspect of the recordings. The majority of submissions demonstrated that candidates had selected appropriate microphones and positioned them competently. Most centres now seem very aware of the requirements of this task across the mark scheme and, whilst lots of centres do not have access to purpose built recording studios, the use of screens and acoustic panelling is making a very significant difference in many cases. Many candidates still struggle to achieve a consistently detailed focus across all parts, whilst room ambience continues to be an issue in some recordings. Correct positioning of microphones is crucial to overcoming such problems.

Candidates do struggle sometimes to achieve clear focus on "additional" parts in their arrangements. Percussion parts and backing vocals can often sound like an "afterthought" - recorded to make up the track count. Candidates need to ensure that all parts are carefully thought out in terms of their capture and positioning in the mix.

This year, an even greater number of recordings demonstrated effective noise elimination. However, background noise could clearly be heard on a few recordings (mainly at the start and end of the track). Such noise needs to be edited out (where possible) and a re-recording made where not.

Candidates should take the time to listen to their finished CD to ensure that the start/end of the track is not chopped and that there is not a gap of >5 seconds at the start or end.

Processing

This criterion continues to be the section which differentiates a lot of submissions. As seen in previous years, many candidates did not gain credit due to lack of attention or inconsistent application of effects and processes. The most successful candidates were usually those who had selected appropriate material and scored highly in criterion 1. In these instances, candidates usually had less corrective work to achieve at the processing stage. This point cannot be overemphasised enough - time taken to carefully select an appropriate track before recording will have a very significant impact upon the processing. Candidates should be encouraged to consider what instrumentalists/vocalists they have available in order to successfully record a particular track. They should reminded that this task is a chance to demonstrate clear, basic recording technique, rather than an opportunity to simply record a “favourite song”.

In terms of EQ, as in previous years, common issues ranged from muddy mixes and booming bass guitars to very harsh electric guitars and dull drum tracks. In many cases it was clear that no EQ had been used when the track would have clearly benefitted from some.

Dynamic processing was handled with varying degrees of success (the choice of song again played a crucial role here). Many candidates struggled to get the lead vocal to “sit” in the mix, whilst kick drums and bass guitars were often lacking in sufficient control. Some tracks had been overcompressed with “pumping” an issue - it appears that many candidates had been seeking to master their tracks as loud as possible and had overdone it. Gating was used by some candidates and this tended to be used reasonably effectively with some exceptions. Dynamic processing is being increasingly added at the output stage. This is sometimes effective, but too often it has been used too heavily.

FX were reasonably well handled. Most mixes showed some attempt to use reverb although its application was often inconsistent. Instruments occupying very different spaces was, again a common observation made by examiners. Delay is also being increasingly well utilised and there were examples of very effective guitar FX. There are still some candidates choosing to use no reverb at all in a misguided attempt to create a “dry” contemporary mix.

Balance and blend

Many candidates attained an appropriate sense of balance (particularly if the stimulus material chosen was appropriate). However, it was still common for particular instruments to be over-favoured in the mix (often electric guitars, vocal or drums). The blending of instruments was more varied with many candidates struggling to fully achieve this aspect. In particular, candidates offering submissions containing a large number of

DI'd instruments often failed to successfully blend these with the tracks captured via microphones.

In terms of stereo, most candidates attempted to establish an effective stereo field (although there were still a number of mono submissions). Many candidates panned the drum overheads (sometimes to an extreme), but greater care needs to be taken over panning other elements of the mix. Many mixes "pulled" to one side due to inconsistencies in this area. It is still quite common for mixes to feature noticeable imbalances between parts or extreme/irregular arrangements in panning. Centres should encourage students, as far as possible, to review their mixes on a set of adequate monitoring speakers as well as headphones and always keep in mind contemporary conventions in the use of stereo field.

Creative Sequenced Arrangement

This year, the most popular style was house (approx. 75%). The most popular song was "Seven Nation Army" (approx. 60%).

There were examples of outstanding work across both styles with high scoring candidates demonstrating a secure and idiomatic understanding of their chosen style. There were a number of arrangements that showed extensive and convincing development of "Seven Nation Army" and "I Want It That Way".

However, as in previous years many candidates still take a relatively piecemeal and formulaic approach to developing the musical content of their sequence often relying on a few stock inventions across some of the criteria from which to construct their arrangement. Many of the arrangements in the "house" style tended towards being too repetitive.

Use of stimulus

As witnessed in previous years, more candidates now appear to be approaching this task with the required focus on developing the stimulus within their chosen style. Many submissions successfully incorporated the stimulus material into the arrangements and there were very few pieces where the stimulus was unrecognisable.

However, many candidates did not significantly develop the stimulus material. Too many candidates simply repeated the given melody and chord sequence. In house arrangements some candidates simply inputted the stimulus melody and chords and added "house" backing drum loops, whilst in reggae arrangements some candidates inputted the stimulus melody over a simple "off-beat" backing. Such arrangements often sounded very repetitive. The higher scoring candidates demonstrated extensive and convincing development in all aspects. In the best examples, fragmentation was utilised across a number of parts with significant detail in the layering and weaving together of motifs.

Style / Coherence

Most candidates captured the basic essence of their chosen style although a few submissions did not. In house, most candidates appeared to have undertaken some relevant listening to inform their choices concerning instrumentation, rhythm and tempo. In reggae, candidates often utilised key features such as offbeat rhythms, appropriate choice of instruments and solos.
Many candidates captured the style of their chosen genre, but failed to create a sense of coherence/flow between sections. There was too much repetition in a significant number of submissions. Those who achieved better usually appeared to have planned their approach to development more carefully and researched their chosen genre more thoroughly (which often benefited their response to Questions 9 and 10 as well).

Use of Music Technology

Confidence, control and creativity with use of music technology continues to be increasing, with many students demonstrating a clear understanding of the technical requirements of the two styles.
Many candidates showed clear listening and understanding of very contemporary approaches to house music production, underlining the relevance of the qualification. Many who created reggae arrangements incorporated elements of dub that enabled them to exploit technology creatively and produce results that were well beyond a basic MIDI rendition of the style. In both cases, most candidates showed good awareness of how to direct the technology at their disposal to good effect.

As in previous years, in both genres some candidates appeared not to have checked their final recordings for obvious errors, such as cuts/lead outs, which could have been easily rectified.

Melody

The extent to which melody was developed and added to varied considerably. Many candidates created effective bass riffs which provided a solid foundation for their pieces. In addition, the use of countermelodies was effective in some arrangements. The higher scoring candidates developed the given melodic material extensively, adding their own melodic ideas and countermelodies which blended seamlessly with the original material. However, some candidates did not develop the original stimulus melody and, where attempted, the results were often formulaic and/or inconsistent.

In house, the original melody was often developed effectively using fragmentation. In reggae, the creation of instrumental solos were often

worthy of considerable credit although some submissions were overly reliant upon such solos to provide melodic interest. Candidates should spend more time developing and extending their melodic ideas at the outset of the task in order to score higher in this category.

Harmony

The development of harmony remains an area in which a very significant number of candidates again did not score higher than “3”. Many candidates simply completed the given chords without any successful development/new additions leading to a “functional” harmony. A few candidates changed the chords to ones which did not fit with the melody, leading to uncomfortable passages. In house, the harmony was often taken directly from the stimulus with very little alteration. Where the harmony was developed the outcome was often successful. Candidates need to think carefully about how they can extend the given harmonic material.

Rhythm

This aspect is, once again an area where a large number of candidates scored well, although there was less extensive development in some submissions. Whilst many candidates in 2013 had experimented with the dubstep “wub” to create complex rhythms, there were too many candidates last year who relied upon preset “trance” loops rather than developing their own. This year, there was again a tendency to rely too heavily on preset “house” loops. This often led to arrangements where the rhythms were overly repetitive. Higher scoring candidates showed considerable rhythmic development in their work as loops were edited and new rhythmic motifs added as the piece progressed. In reggae, higher scoring candidates also made creative use of off-beat rhythms, different drum fills, bass patterns and rhythmically complex instrumental solos.

Texture and Instrumentation

There was some good work from many candidates in both genres to produce appropriate textures. In house, texture was often approached with some thought and imagination. In reggae, arrangements often demonstrated a solid understanding of the roles of the different instruments. However, as witnessed last year, most candidates’ submissions did not fully develop the texture to reach the top mark box. There was too much repetition in many arrangements. Higher scoring candidates created idiomatic textures that maintained interest throughout the piece.

Form / structure

Most submissions remain at least functional in this aspect with some sense of direction. A significant number of submissions simply followed the stimulus, whilst others were excessively repetitive. In house, some candidates produced a good sense of flow between sections, whilst in reggae the use of instrumental solos was often very effective. Higher scoring candidates produced appropriate, but creative structures that built on, but also extended the structure of their chosen stimulus. Candidates need to think about how to bring appropriate structural variety to their arrangements, creating contrast between the different sections.

Logbooks

Many examiners commented on continued improvement in this aspect of the unit (particularly in Questions 9 and 10). However, the logbooks do continue to vary in quality considerably.

Questions 1-8

Some submissions included photographs of mic set-ups and screen shots, whilst others gave very little information and contained several blank pages. Where included, photographs of mic positioning proved to be very helpful as they gave an accurate demonstration of the mic setup used. Questions 1-8 are a vital source of information for the examiner who refers to them when marking. If features are not clearly identified they may not receive the full credit they deserve.

However, an increasing number of submissions continue to include large numbers of additional pages attached to their logbooks for questions 1-8. **This is not helpful and should be discouraged**. Candidates are reminded that questions 1-8 in the logbooks are there to give some information to the examiner; **the space given in the logbook provided for questions 1-8 is sufficient for this to be achieved**. If candidates would like to add a few additional pages because they provide key additional information then they may do so. However, the added benefit of doing so is limited. A number of candidates had submitted very detailed answers (including large numbers of additional pages of screenshots) for questions 1-8 and then only brief answers for questions 9 and 10. More time spent answering questions 9 and 10 would have significantly increased their chances of gaining further credit.

Questions 9 and 10

Many examiners commented on a continued overall improvement in the answers to questions 9 and 10.
The addition of extra sheets for questions 9 and 10 is to be encouraged. It is very difficult (though not impossible) for a candidate to produce an answer that is “substantial and thorough” in the space provided for these questions. Most candidates who score highly on questions 9 and

10 have continued their answer on an additional sheet(s) of paper. (Please note: any additional sheets must be clearly labelled with the candidate's name and number and question number and a suitable phrase such as *"continued on a separate sheet"* should be written at the bottom of the question page in the logbook to clearly show that the answer has been continued).

However, some candidates are still missing out on further credit here. Centres are reminded that questions 9 and 10 worth 20 marks and that the answers can be thoroughly prepared before writing up. Many candidates' submissions failed to score highly in this aspect and it can have a very significant effect on their overall result for Unit 1.

Question 9

This question requires the candidate to explain how the arrangement was developed from the stimulus.
The tendency for too many candidates to focus on the development of their style, rather than the stimulus was less evident this year. However, a number of candidates did not refer to the stimulus in sufficient detail. The more successful responses again provided specific detail (bar/time references, chord/note names, section descriptions) and demonstrated correct use of musical or technical terminology, to indicate clearly their intentions and rationale when developing the stimulus. There were a number of examples again this year of candidates who had written a large amount for question 9, but not focused on how the stimulus has been developed. This reduces the amount of credit that can be awarded. Candidates must focus on the stimulus and how it has been developed in this question.

Question 10

This question requires the candidate to correctly identify the stylistic features of the chosen style *and* explain how these are used in the arrangement.
As in previous years, most students appeared to have conducted some research around their chosen genre, but many still relied on a simplistic or generalised understanding of a few stylistic rudiments. Common shortcomings involved vague generalisations (such as descriptions of house as being 'upbeat'). Candidates need to focus on being as specific as possible when commenting on how they have included key features in their arrangement. It is not sufficient to write "house uses synths so I have used synths" or "reggae uses off beat rhythms so I have used off beat rhythms". Detail is required for full credit including reasons for choice, details of technology used and examples of house/reggae artists and songs that use similar techniques.
Higher scoring responses demonstrated breadth of listening with reference to specific tracks/artists. They showed a more sophisticated appreciation of the specific subtleties of the genre, linking this understanding clearly to specific features of their own arrangement (often using time or bar references, where useful).

Administration

The overwhelming majority of centres submitted work on time and complete.

A few centres failed to pack the CDs adequately so that they arrived broken, but the number of cases was very low. Candidates should be strongly encouraged to pack their submissions appropriately to avoid damage in transit. In other cases work had not been thoroughly checked before sending to the examiner. A few CDs were blank or contained only data. In such cases, it is vital that centres respond to requests for replacement work from examiners promptly. Whilst it is understood by the examining team that CD errors do occur, all CD's should be checked for playback in a standard CD player (not computer CD drive).

If candidates are wanting to submit additional sheets in their logbook these should be clearly labelled with candidate name, number and centre name/number, put in the booklet in the right place and secured with a treasury tag/staples. However, please refer to the comments in *The Logbooks* section above concerning the use of too many additional sheets.

It is important for centres to retain back-up material. Centres should refer to the *Administrative Support Guide* (formerly *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* document) that is available on the GCE Music Technology website under *Assessment Materials/ Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations*.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx

Pearson Education Limited. Registered company number 872828
with its registered office at Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex CM20 2JE